OPEN AND SHUT?

Friday, June 10, 2005

Interview with Melissa Hagemann of the Open Society Institute

In 2002 George Soros' *Open Society Institute* (OSI) *provided $3 million* in funding to support Open Access. What's been achieved since then, and what remains to be done? OSI's Melissa Hagemann talks to Richard Poynder.

Q: Can you start by saying something about yourself, and your background?

A: Sure. Before joining the Open Society Institute I worked in the European Parliament in Brussels, and I have a Masters from the London School of Economics.

Q: OSI is a private foundation set up by the financier and philanthropist George Soros, and established in 1993?

A: Right, and I joined in 1994, shortly after the OSI-Budapest office opened. Initially I worked on our Regional Library Program, which I managed from 1995-1997.

Q: What was the Regional Library Program?

A: We worked in 24 countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the fSU [former Soviet Union], providing assistance on a range of library issues, including library automation, preservation and conservation, collection development and management training.

Q: And you are now based in New York?

A: Yes. I moved to OSI-New York in 1998, to manage our Science Journals Donation Program (SJDP). This had formerly been part of the International Science Foundation, which provided over $100 million to support scientists in the fSU following the fall of communism.

Q: What is your current role at OSI?

A: I am the Program Manager of the Open Access Project, [OAP]which is part of OSI's Information Program. I would add that although I work out of OSI-New York, I now travel extensively.

Q: What is the Information Program and what other projects fit within it?

A: The Information Program was formed in 2001 as a result of the consolidation of OSI's internet, library and publishing programs. The aim of OSI is to support the development of open societies, and within this context the Information Program promotes the equitable deployment of knowledge and communications resources — providing access to content, tools, and networks — for civic empowerment and effective democratic governance.

Q: That's certainly an ambitious and broad-ranging program.

A: It is, and we focus on seven areas: internet policy; technology support for civil society organisations and networks; development of software tools for civil society and non-profit applications; library consortia for developing countries; open access to research literature; intellectual property; citizen-government communication; and translations.

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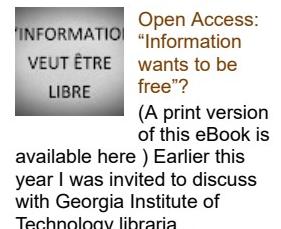Interview 1: Richard Poynder
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Q: *The OAP has earmarked $3 million in funding to support the OA movement. Why?*

A: Given OSI's long-standing support for libraries and publishing within developing and transition countries, we were quite interested in the development of arXiv, and the response that the Public Library of Science petition generated in 2001. We saw that these initiatives had the same goal of providing more efficient communication of scholarly research, so we thought we would bring together a group of leaders who were exploring alternative forms of scholarly communication.

Q: *Which led to a meeting in Budapest in December 2001.*

A: Right. And I'm sure it isn't hard to imagine — given the individuals involved — the amazing discussions that took place.

Q: *And no doubt lots of jostling over strategy?*

A: Absolutely. But it was finally agreed that we would put forward a dual strategy, which called for the creation of open access archives and repositories, and open access journals.

Q: *Right, and these two approaches are now generally referred to as the Green Road to OA, and the Gold Road to OA. The participants also produced a manifesto didn't they?*

A: We did. At one point someone suggested it would be helpful to write a manifesto and Peter Suber volunteered to take the lead in writing it. This led to a flurry of e-mail debates and discussions that lasted for about two and half months, and the end product was the Budapest Open Access Initiative.

Q: *Who else within OSI is involved in the Open Access Project?*

A: The director of the Information Program is Darius Cuplinskas. The member of the Sub-board who is most active within the OA movement is Jean Claude Guédon, although another sub-board member, Anthony So (who is also on the PubMed Central Advisory Committee), is quite active as well. The chair of the Sub-board is Istvan Rév and he has played a large role in shaping some of our most important projects.

Q: *Such as?*

A: When we first launched the BOAI, and OSI pledged its support to the open access movement, for instance, Istvan saw that it was not enough merely to advocate for the development of open access journals, but there must be a directory or index where users could find these journals. So when Bo-Christer Bjork gave a presentation on the SciX Project at the first Nordic Conference on Scholarly Communications, and mentioned a list of 300 open access journals that SciX had developed, OSI approached him and asked if SciX would be interested in maintaining such a list.

Q: *I did not know about this list.*

A: Well, it turned out that it was outside SciX's mandate to do what we asked, but Bo-Christer offered to give us the list if we could find someone to take on the project. So during the conference OSI mentioned that it would be interested in funding such a directory and Lars Bjørnshauge of Lund University Libraries approached us and said that Lund would like to take on the project.

Q: *OK, so that became the Directory of Open Access Journals?*

A: Yes.

Q: *How much of the $3 million that OSI put aside for Open Access has been spent and what are the future priorities?*

A: Since 2001 OSI has spent close to two million dollars to support the open access movement. In terms of our future priorities, we want to work with funding agencies, publishers, universities, and academics to understand what tools or projects they need in order for the benefits of OA to be properly understood and adopted.

Q: *What are the procedures for awarding grants and who makes the decisions?*

A: The grant approval process within the Information Program is the following: the program manager discusses the proposal with the director and if there is interest in the proposal the program manager prepares an executive summary of the grant for the Sub-board recommending funding. The Sub-board makes final decisions on grants.

Q: I understand it is taking longer to spend the money than you envisaged. Why is this?

A: The Sub-board determined that it would be better to spread funding out over several years instead of spending the $3 million in three years and withdrawing from the movement.

Q: There was last year some criticism of the way that the OAP money was being awarded, with complaints that there has been a greater stress on funding OA publishing initiatives (the Gold Road) rather than self-archiving projects (the Green Road). Were these complaints justified?

A: To be honest, I have only heard this comment from one person within the OA movement — one who is an ardent supporter of the Green Road. OSI has always approached our funding as supporting the OA movement as a whole, and we do not label a project as being supportive of one strategy or the other. However as those who label themselves supporters of the Green Road have pointed out, this strategy is less expensive than OA publishing, so if there has been a difference in the level of funding, this could explain it.

Q: Discussions about the relative merits of the Green Road versus the Gold Road can sometimes become a little heated, but I wonder if you could say which you personally believe to be the better route to OA?

A: I truly do not believe that one is preferable over the other, but that each needs the other in order for OA to succeed.

Q: In the wake of the UK Select Committee Report it seems to me that the Green Road appears today to have greater mindshare within the OA movement. Would you agree?

A: Maybe the Green Road advocates are more vocal. But I don't think that the movement has necessarily sided with one strategy over the other.

Q: One active supporter of the Green Road — Stevan Harnad *— asked me to put the following question to you: "How/why did Jean-Claude Guédon become a consultant on OSI OA policy?" I suspect that the question is motivated by Harnad's disagreements with Guédon over OA strategy, but since Guédon is the only member of the OA movement to be involved in an official capacity with the OAP I wonder if you could say why he was chosen to represent the movement, rather than someone else?*

A: Jean-Claude is a member of the OSI Information Program Sub-board, and not a "consultant on OSI OA policy." Sub-board members are selected due to their expertise in a particular subject area.

Q: Beyond providing grants for OA projects what else does the OAP do to support OA?

A: We are mainly a grant-giving organisation, but in addition to providing grants, several members of the Sub-board and I are quite active within the OA movement itself.

Q: Can you say more about these activities?

A: As I mentioned, Anthony So is a member of the PubMed Central Advisory Board and Jean-Claude Guédon speaks at many, many international OA conferences. Jean-Claude is also on the organising committees of OAI2-4 and Berlin 4, and I have been on the organising committees for OAI2-4 as well as the OA policy meeting in Beijing, to be held on June 22-24.

Q: One OA advocate commented to me that they felt OAP has failed to take "ownership" of OA. Their point was that in restricting itself to being a grant funder, and not also being an advocate for OA, OSI has had less impact than it might have had. Is such criticism fair?

A: OSI never wanted to claim "ownership" of the movement. Our intention from the beginning was to provide seed funding, and to help to launch a broad-based movement. Through BOAI this is what we have done — helping, for instance, to define what Open Access is.

But I really don't think it can be said that we have not also been an advocate for OA: we have been doing this through our grant making. Take for example our support of Peter Suber's work: Peter is one of the most effective advocates of OA.

Q: Right. You provided funding for Suber's Free Online Scholarship Newsletter.

A: We have also provided over $175,000 to the Open Access Project at Public Knowledge, which Peter directs. Part of this funding goes to support Open Access News.

Q: *Some might nevertheless argue that, with its rolling program of "follow-up" meetings, it is the Berlin Declaration group that is mainly driving the movement today. Would you agree, and do you envisage the OAP partnering with the organisers of future Berlin Declaration follow-up meetings?*

A: As I said, one of our main goals was to attract other funders and organisations to the OA movement, so OSI was very pleased when Max Planck held the first Berlin meeting in October 2003, and Jean-Claude attended. As I said, Jean-Claude is also a member of the organising committee for Berlin 4.

Q: *What about the Bethesda Declaration? Nothing further seems to have come from that initiative since it was announced in April 2003. Has it now disappeared off the map?*

A: Well, as you are asking about it, it clearly hasn't disappeared. Certainly in convening the first meeting of research funders to address OA, and enabling the Bethesda Declaration, the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) provided a blueprint for other funders to consider. Indeed, much of the language within the Bethesda Declaration was incorporated into the Berlin Declaration. However, since the OA landscape has changed dramatically over the past two years I can see that it might be helpful to bring the funders together again.

Q: *Who would you say have been the key players in the Open Access movement to date and what have been their particular contributions?*

A: There are so many people behind the OA movement (and on so many different levels) that I wouldn't want to attempt to name them, as I could never provide a comprehensive list. Besides, I believe for OA to succeed we must all work together and not allow the movement to be divided by competing personalities.

Q: *What would you say have been the big wins for the OA movement since the Budapest meeting, and what have been the big disappointments?*

A: Since the launch of the BOAI, I would say there have been many more victories for the OA movement than disappointments. From OSI's perspective, we were thrilled when the HHMI held the Bethesda meeting, as well as Max Planck's interest in OA and the launch of the Berlin Declaration.

Also of note was the Wellcome Trust's report and Wellcome's subsequent involvement in the OA movement, the UK enquiry, the NIH proposal (although not necessarily the final policy which emerged), OUP's adoption of the hybrid model for the *Journal of Nucleic Acids*, BioMed Central's launch of over 100 OA journals, and the $9 million grant from the Moore foundation to Public Library of Science, to name just a few.

Clearly the UK government's response and the current version of the NIH policy are somewhat disappointing, but on the whole the movement has accomplished a great deal in only a few years.

Q: *Were you surprised at the outcome of the UK Select Committee enquiry and the UK Government's response?*

A: Of course I was very pleased with the UK Select Committee enquiry. The report itself is one of the most comprehensive and balanced studies of OA. But I was quite surprised by the level of influence that the UK Department of Trade and Industry seems to have exerted over the Government's response. Nonetheless I believe that the enquiry has set in motion a process that will result in OA gaining significant ground in the UK.

Q: *What role should governments and other research funders play in supporting OA?*

A: As more and more governments begin to understand the waste of public resources which results from the old system — in which taxpayers pay once for research, and a second time for access to its results — I believe we will see a change in their positions and a willingness to explore different models.

However, it is very important that as governments begin to require that the research they fund be made available through OA, they must specify that funds will also be made available for the article processing fee.

Q: *How do you think the NIH plan will be viewed when the OA history books are written?*

A: I think it will be seen as a very important first step in governmental attempts to ensure that the research they fund is made as widely available as possible. I also believe it will be viewed as a learning process for all involved, and will provide information that will help other government agencies to adopt more effective policies.

Q: The initial NIH policy wording was that NIH-funded researchers would be *required* to make their research freely available *six months* after publication; the final policy only *recommends* it, and suggests it be done within *twelve months*. There is some concern within the movement that this backtracking may encourage publishers to insist that researchers embargo their papers for twelve months. Is this problematic?

A: I think it is very important for the OA movement to work closely with publishers and not get too far ahead of them. Otherwise they could be placed in a position in which they feel they have to react defensively. As I say, this is why it is very important that any requirement which is made by a funding agency to have research which it funds made freely available through OA also include provisions for the financing of the article processing fee. By ensuring that this fee will be covered we can help to try to avert a situation in which publishers feel they must impose embargoes.

Q: What else can be done to assuage publisher fears?

A: OSI and SPARC [the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition] have been working with publisher associations to hold annual roundtables to discuss the OA model with their members. This series began in September 2002 and the third roundtable was held last November.

Q: How do you feel the OA movement will impact on science in developing countries?

A: It will allow scientists and academics in these countries to not only access the material which they need to conduct their research, but also allow them to more efficiently contribute their important work to the global research community.

Q: I realise that developing countries are a priority for OSI, but how would you reply to those who might say that although providing access to medical information for people in developing countries is laudable it is not a specifically OA issue, and so should not have such a high focus within OAP?

A: Well, the work that OSI is doing in developing and transition countries goes far beyond "providing access to medical information". As I say, through the development of institutional repositories and encouraging researchers in these countries to contribute to and launch OA journals, the global research community as a whole is greatly strengthened. The research that is being done in these countries is at the forefront of many fields — research on tropical diseases for instance. Consequently, colleagues in Western Europe and the US will also greatly benefit from having the local content that is produced in the developing world more readily available.

Q: Can you say more about OSI's OA work in developing countries?

A: Sure. OSI is working with eIFL [electronic Information for Libraries], an organisation that has developed national library consortia in over 50 developing and transition countries and negotiates and advocates for the wide availability of electronic resources for library users.

Through our eIFL Open Access Developing Country Program, we have held the first open access workshops in South Africa and Lithuania. As a result of the interest which was generated by the OA workshop in Pretoria last July, we sponsored an intensive workshop on institutional repositories in South Africa in mid-May, which directly led to the creation of three institutional repositories at universities in southern Africa, and more are planned. We are also in the process of helping to organise conferences in China, Russia, Serbia, and Slovenia.

In addition, through our national foundation in Ukraine we held a successful OA workshop in Kiev in February, the recommendations of which have been endorsed by the Ukrainian Vice Prime Minister.

Q: What are the long-term aims of the OAP?

A: To provide OA with a firm footing so that OSI can step back from its direct involvement with the movement.

Q: What are your personal hopes and expectations for the OA movement and what's the end game from your perspective: a world of 100% OA?

A: Personally, I think people will continue to experiment with the delivery of scholarly communication and OA will be one model that will provide an effective means for

doing this.

Q: *The two groups who seem most likely to suffer financially from a shift to OA are traditional publishers (both commercial and learned societies) and librarians (which is ironic given their historic support for OA). What is your message to each of these two groups?*

A: While one recent study has mentioned this, it is more likely that these players would only be impacted financially (if they are at all) during the transition to OA. And remember that other studies have concluded that the OA model is the best model for society as a whole. I would repeat that for the transition to be successful it is imperative that funding agencies support the article processing fee.

Q: *When does the Open Access Project end, and might it be extended? I note, for instance, that the BOAI web site indicates that more funds could be made available?*

A: No date has been set for the end of the program. The Sub-board will decide if additional funding above the $3 million will be allocated.

Q: *The website also says that achieving OA is taking longer than originally envisaged: what is your view on the current timescale?*

A: Actually the statement on our site reads: "we have realised that the transition to Open Access will require a longer time commitment"; in other words, a longer time commitment from OSI than three years.

In fact, we have been pleasantly surprised that Open Access has gained such a strong foothold in such a short period of time. When you look back, we didn't really have a term for, or definition of, Open Access before the Budapest meeting, so the fact that it is now being debated within governments, funding bodies and universities demonstrates the importance of the process that began in Budapest.

Q: *What still needs to be done to achieve OA, and who should do it?*

A: Clearly advocacy is very important, as more people need to be made aware of OA and this task falls upon the shoulders of all involved in the movement. In my opinion, the main target groups are governments, funding agencies, publishers, universities, and academics.

Details of open access projects supported by the OSI Information Program can be viewed here.

Posted by Richard Poynder at 12:04

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